

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Budget boosts, war powers, and AUMF repeal: Your guide to the NDAA

The Takeaway:

- The Senate is deep in the process of considering its version of the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) — a massive war spending authorization bill with a topline Pentagon budget of over three quarters of a trillion dollars.
- Progressive champions are hoping to use the NDAA to promote some key foreign policy priorities, from repealing the 2002 AUMF to ending U.S. involvement in Yemen to cutting the Pentagon budget.
- But regardless of some potential wins, the fact remains that the NDAA is a massive check for warmaking, and mired in the militarist status quo. As consideration is ongoing, we'll be back after next week's holiday to explore the outcomes.

The Senate NDAA: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

It's NDAA week(s) in the Senate, and if you're a longtime reader, you know that that means a *whirlwind* of foreign policy decisions on everything from Yemen to China to [quantum physics](#). At this very moment, we're right in the thick of a messy process of negotiating, amending, and voting — and the Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief is here to guide you through it.

What's the NDAA?

Every year for the past 60 years, Congress has passed a bill called the NDAA to authorize funding and set policy for the Pentagon and associated programs for the following year. Because the NDAA is widely (though wrongly) considered “must pass” legislation, it's one of the few legislative vehicles left that has bipartisan pressure to pass. As a result, lawmakers seek to push their particular priorities forward by attaching it to the NDAA — and the bill snowballs into an unwieldy Frankenstein of a foreign policy package.

How The Sausage Is Made

If this is all sounding familiar, it's for good reason. The NDAA process is long and arduous, and we've been following it the whole way through. To [simplify](#): the House and Senate Armed Services Committees each draft their own versions of the bill, which are then deliberated, amended, and voted out of committee. Each chamber takes up their respective versions in turn, and members have the opportunity to propose amendments to the underlying bill. At the discretion of Congressional leadership, and often as a result of backroom-bargaining, some of

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these amendments will get individual votes, some will be voted on in batches, and others won't be considered at all. Once amendments are voted on, and each chamber considers and, ultimately, passes their version of the bill, the two are brought together "in conference" to come to an agreement on a shared version. Finally, the negotiated version is brought back to each chamber, voted on once again, and, if all goes smoothly, sent to the president to be signed into law.

Where Things Stand

So where are we in this process? It wasn't two months ago that we devoted an entire Debrief to the House NDAA. Our verdict then: it's "[A Threat to Genuine National Security](#)". Now, we're deep in the proposing, negotiating, and horse-trading of amendments in the Senate. While they won't all get a vote, and they certainly won't all pass, here's a sample of the amendments on the table:

The Good

- **[The AUMFs](#)**: The 2001 and 2002 AUMFs are outdated, dangerous pieces of endless war architecture. Sen. Kaine's amendment would (finally) repeal the 2002 Iraq War AUMF (and 1991 Gulf War AUMF), and Sen. Murphy's would require a two-year sunset for *all* AUMFs, current and future.
- **War Powers**: Also from Sen. Murphy is an amendment that would attach to the NDAA the entire [National Security Powers Act](#), which would place critical limits on presidential overreach on national emergencies, war powers, and arms sales.
- **Sanctions**: The United States' unilateral use of broad-based sanctions is ineffective, illegal, and deadly. Senator Warren's amendment would require a report on the effectiveness and humanitarian impact of these sanctions. It's not an *end* to their use, but it's a start.
- **Yemen**: President Biden has promised to halt U.S. support for offensive operations in Yemen. So far, he's failed to live up to it. The Sanders-Khanna amendment would end [U.S. complicity](#) in the catastrophic war in Yemen once and for all.
- **Policing**: The [1033 program](#) funnels military weapons to domestic policing. It is egregious, violent, and racist. Sen. Schatz's amendment would help restrain it.
- **Pentagon Spending**: Last but *certainly* not least are the many laudable efforts to cut the United States' *egregious* Pentagon budget and invest instead in real human needs: Sen. Merkley's proposal to reallocate \$100 million from the B83 nuclear bomb toward global vaccine production; Sen. Markey's to reallocate 1% of the Pentagon budget to climate action; and Sen. Sanders' proposals to cut the Pentagon budget by 1% for every year that it can't pass an audit, and by 10% right here and now. (And [here's](#) Sanders' powerful speech supporting his amendments).

The Bad

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- **The Topline:** The amendments above, if passed, would be improvements. But they would be improvements from a *horrendous* baseline. The Senate NDAA, as it stands, would authorize \$778 billion for weapons and war. Yes, in the midst of a pandemic, climate change, and inequality crisis, the Senate's starting point wants to increase the Pentagon's budget by \$37 billion from Trump's final budget. Oh, and Sen. Wicker has [proposed](#) an amendment to add \$25.3 billion *more* on top of that.
- **Afghanistan:** Afghanistan's economy is on the verge of collapse. And while it's out of good intentions to not try to benefit the Taliban, the reality is that it's everyday people who will pay the price of economic crisis. That's why Sen. Paul's amendment to block funds, including humanitarian assistance, from going to Afghanistan, and Sen. Kennedy's to proposal to stop Afghanistan from accessing a critical international currency called [Special Drawing Rights](#) would do more harm than good.
- **So Much More:** There are literally *hundreds* of submitted amendments to the NDAA (900 or so by our count). From imposing new sanctions, to blocking normalization of relations with Cuba, to all sorts of measures deepening the antagonistic, Cold War approach to U.S.-China relations, there's much to be concerned about. Fortunately, few of these will end up getting a vote.

The Ugly

The NDAA is never something to celebrate. Sure, there may be some policy wins here or there, and there's good reason to fight over particular amendments (so that things don't get even worse). But the NDAA as a whole, from start to finish, is *ugly* — an annual, bipartisan authorization for *hundreds of billions of dollars* for warmaking, stuffed to the brim with important policy decisions that are considered, negotiated, and rushed through with little public deliberation, and rubber-stamped by a large majority of Congress that would never dare standing in the way between the Pentagon and its money.

What Comes Next

After a few false starts and long nights, Senate leadership has decided to take a break and try again after next week's Thanksgiving recess. As always, we'll be there every step of the way, working arm-in-arm with movements, grassroots activists, and our champions in Congress to advance our progressive priorities, push back on the worst amendments, and keep up the fight for a future where massive checks for warmaking are anything but "must pass."

See You In December!

We at Win Without War will be taking most of next week to rest, recharge, eat ourselves sick, and spend time with the friends and loved ones that inspire us to keep up the fight. But we'll be back in December to take you through the rest of the NDAA process, the upcoming Iran deal negotiations, and whatever else may come our way. We hope you enjoy the week too — and to

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help you do so on a holiday with problematic origins, here's a Tiny Desk concert playlist [celebrating](#) Native American Heritage month.

BURIED LEDES

With today's [news](#) in Wisconsin, **we choose not to give space to white supremacists, but to instead hold in our memories Anthony, JoJo, and all of those who suffer under the brutality of a racist system** — and to recommit ourselves to dismantling it.

This week is Transgender Awareness Week. But it's 2021: be more than aware — be educated, show up, and fight back. Here are [some initial resources](#) to get you started in your workplace.

Every year, Congress justifies their decision to inflate the bloated Pentagon budget by invoking the magic word: jobs. **David Story is a defense industry worker and union leader. And this year [he says](#): Not in my name. Limitless war spending doesn't help workers like me.**

As if you needed any more evidence that our war economy is a nightmare... **U.S. taxpayer dollars, funneled through contracting companies, have funded the [exploitation](#) of tens of thousands of Nepali and other Southasian labourers contracted to work in our warzones.**

Et tu, U.S.A.? Putting a knife in climate talks is what we do best. **The COP26 climate pact caves to [U.S. pressure](#) to focus on coal, omit oil and gas, and avoid an equitable phaseout,** in effect, protecting the status quo and throwing the Global South under the bus.

What's it called when you do the same thing over and over again and expect a different result? Sanctions? **The Biden administration claims to support a more humane foreign policy; our ongoing [sanctions regime](#) reveals a different, brutal reality.** Something's gotta give.

The growing food emergency in Afghanistan illustrates how our economic warfare puts everyday people at risk. **The UN envoy to Afghanistan urged that the crisis in Afghanistan is "[preventable](#),"** noting the role of frozen assets and international sanctions.

New data suggests that **the U.S. and its aligned countries are helping to [drive](#) global democratic backsliding** within the past decade. Our sales pitch goes like this: *Saying we're spreading democracy abroad and then doing the opposite, since 1776. Satisfaction guaranteed!*

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Pencils down, everybody! This is your weekly reminder that **the Pentagon is the only federal agency that has never, EVER passed an audit.** [Looks like 2027 will be more of the same.](#) Clearly, the NDAA's proposed \$778 BILLION Pentagon budget will be money well spent.

And finally, for once, [some Fox News coverage](#) that *YOU* and I can get behind.